

Octagon: probably much of it thrown from the windows. A layer of sand covering the deposit in some areas, suggests that an attempt was made to reduce the odour of decaying organic wastes. This speaks of what was acceptable sanitary conditions at the time!

The restoration of the Depot at York Factory was achieved and all of the engineering objectives were met. In the process, from design to finished product, the actual foundations and environmental systems were modified or redesigned to protect the subsurface remains of the Octagon in as many places as possible. *In situ* artifacts did not fare as well but concessions were made by all involved personnel to remove artifacts in as scientific a manner as possible within the constricted time frames. This was accomplished primarily as a result of learning that the new policy expects Parks Canada to respect all cultural resources equally. Through the evolution of the project a necessary sense of co-operation and teamwork

was built between archaeologists and restoration workers in the field, to solve mutual CRM concerns.

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Tales that Privies Tell

Excavating the latrine at Fort Wellington.

Excavating an old latrine may not sound like much fun but it can provide a great deal of information concerning the lives of the people who used it. This is especially true when the recovered material is carefully analyzed and interpreted, something that many researchers do not undertake either because of tight timetables or a lack of the required knowledge. Fortunately, in the case of Fort Wellington, a 19th-century British fort in the city of Prescott, Ontario, a thorough interdisciplinary study was possible. The resultant knowledge significantly altered existing perceptions of life at the fort and led to the revision of the interpretation program at the site. Fort Wellington was established overlooking the St. Lawrence River during the War of 1812 to ensure that the vital transportation route linking Montréal and Kingston remained open. The fort was abandoned in 1826, but reoccupied in 1839 in response to the Rebellion of Upper Canada. A number of alterations were made at this time, including the construction of a three-storey blockhouse and a latrine. The fort was garrisoned by battalions of various regiments over the years, as well as several militia units. The elite Royal Canadian Rifle Regiment (RCRR)

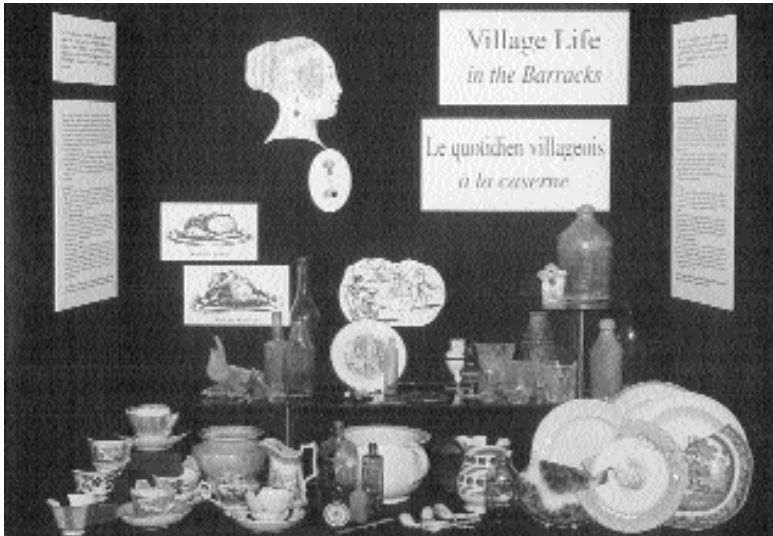
inhabited the fort from 1843 to 1854.

A stabilization program was conducted at the fort from 1990 to 1992.

This was accompanied by investigations undertaken by archaeology staff from the Ontario Regional Office of Parks Canada in Cornwall, Ontario, under the direction of Joe Last. The work included the investigation of the gate entrance, the west palisade curtain wall and the latrine.

While much useful information was obtained from all the excavations, most of it came from the fill of the garrison privy. This unique structure—the only extant wood-framed military latrine of its age in Canada—consists of a hipped-roofed structure divided into three rooms. The southern-most room was for the enlisted men. It lacked seats, so the men perched precariously above a bench along the east wall using hand holds. Women used the central room which had a two-seater arrangement,





A display interpreting village life in the Fort Wellington barracks.

while officers utilized a one-seater in the northernmost room.

Excavation of the latrine's interior uncovered an exceptionally wide array of period artifacts, revealing that, contrary to all rules, the facility had been used extensively as a trash dump and, contrary to specified procedure (and luckily for researchers), was never really cleaned out. As interpretation at the site relates to the 1840s RCRR occupation of the site, Suzanne Ploussos, Material Culture Researcher from the Ontario Region Office, initially identified the relevant layers of latrine fill on the basis of such tightly datable items as belted balls for the Brunswick rifle, military insignia, and marked smoking pipes and ceramics. Various members of the staff of the Material Culture Research section of the Federal Archaeology Office, National Historic Sites Directorate, Ottawa, subsequently verified and refined the attributions, and reported extensively on the recovered artifacts and their significance.

Military equipment was found to be in a minority, the reason being that worn out or broken material had to be turned in for replacement and the discards were then disposed of officially. On the other hand, a truly incredible amount of household refuse was dumped into the latrine (165,000 artifacts were catalogued!), including a large gridiron that could not have been easily sneaked into the structure. This suggests that some rules and regulations concerning privy use were not strictly enforced during the RCRR's stay. The material also reveals that, rather than an austere and regimented life at the fort as implied by historical documents, the enlisted men and their families lived fairly sedentary lives typical of the working class.

Just about every form of household item was represented in the latrine fill. There were eating and cooking utensils, glass tablewares and storage containers, a fair number of worn-out boots and

shoes, sewing materials and hardware, both furniture and builders'. There were also clay tobacco pipes and such diverse objects as tools, barrel hoops and toothbrushes. The wives and children of the soldiers were represented by such items as jewelry, clay marbles and a doll.

However, the bulk of the recovered material consisted of ceramic objects. Coarse earthenware from Ontario potters and stoneware imported from England primarily related to food preparation and storage, though quite a few stoneware blacking and leather polish bottles were also found. But fine ceramics predominated, principally in the form of tablewares (plates, bowls and teaware) and toilet-ware (mostly chamber pots), as well as ornamental pieces and decorative items. As a group, these were the most telling items. Except for several pieces of porcelain, all the material is attributed to the enlisted men and their families. Its presence suggests that the men had sufficient earnings to support their dependents in comfort and even in some gentility. Its diversity (over 100 different patterns of teaware alone were recovered) reveals that the ceramics represent individual purchases and not a standard military issue as had generally been supposed.

Furthermore, the inhabitants obviously desired decorative household furnishings and small luxuries. Personal property was regularly used and visible in the barracks and this was obviously accepted in a military environment. Victorian domestic conventions were clearly observed, especially at mealtimes. The presence of all this material further implies that each family had storage space apart from the area around and under each bedstead; the possessions of an enlisted man were generally confined to this small area. Finally, it appears that children were not only accommodated at the fort, but also somewhat indulged.

The information derived from the latrine at Fort Wellington paints an entirely different picture of daily life among its inhabitants during the 1840s than had previously been derived from historic documents. As a result, visitors to the site are now presented with a drastically different and much more accurate view of British military life in Upper Canada than before. This would not have been possible without a thorough study of the recovered material. Far from reflecting a sparse military existence, the material reveals that the fort was more akin to a working-class community. Silent for many years, the latrine at the fort has truly spoken volumes about the 200 or so men, women and children who used it some 150 years ago.

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